THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
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PERIODICAL READING ROOM

VOL. XLIX, NO. 26: DECEMBER 18, 1952

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CONTENTS

Negation: A. J. AYER 797

Index to Volume XLIX 816

PUBLISHED FORTNIGHTLY
BY THE
JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, INC.

THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

FOUNDED BY FREDERICK J. E. WOODBRIDGE AND WENDELL T. BUSH

EDITORS: Herbert W. Schneider, John H. Randall, Jr., Ernest Nagel.

MANAGING EDITOR: Emerson Buchanan.

Communications to the editors should be addressed to the Managing Editor, 515 West 116th Street, New York 27, N. Y. Subscriptions and advertisements should be sent to THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, Prince and Lemon Streets, Lancaster, Pa., or 515 West 116th Street, New York 27, N. Y. The annual subcription price (twenty-six numbers) is $5.25. The price of single numbers is 35 cents, double numbers, 60 cents.

THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY is owned by the Journal of Philosophy, Inc., and published fortnightly at Prince and Lemon Sts., Lancaster, Pa. Editorial Office: 515 West 116th St., New York 27, N. Y. President, Ernest Nagel; Vice President, Herbert W. Schneider; Treasurer, Frederick A. Dewey; Secretary, Iris Wilder Dean.

Entered as second class matter, March 18, 1921, at the Post Office at Lancaster, Pa., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.

Acceptance for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in paragraph (d-2), section 34.40, P. L. & R. of 1948, authorized March 11, 1952.

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VOLUME XLIX, No. 26 DECEMBER 18, 1952

THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

NEGATION

THAT certain statements have the quality of being negative would hardly seem a matter for dispute. There may be a problem about the way in which affirmative and negative statements are related to each other, but it is commonly taken for granted that we have some adequate means of distinguishing between them. Yet to give a satisfactory account of this distinction is not altogether easy. In practice, one tends to regard a statement as negative if it is expressed by a sentence which contains such English words as *not, no, nobody, nowhere, nothing,* or the corresponding words in other languages. But an argument against taking this as a criterion is that its use would lead to ambiguous results. Thus, the statement that Mt. Everest is the highest mountain in the world is to be classified, according to this principle, as affirmative and the statement that Mt. Everest is not the highest mountain in the world is to be classified as negative. But to say that Mt. Everest is the highest mountain in the world is to say that there is no mountain in the world which is as high as Mt. Everest, a statement which we have now to regard as negative, and to say that Mt. Everest is not the highest mountain in the world is to say that there is some mountain in the world which is higher than Mt. Everest, a statement which we have now to regard as affirmative. It would seem, therefore, that each of these statements is both affirmative and negative according to the means chosen for expressing it. Neither is this by any means an exceptional case. It is well known that a universal statement of fact, which we should have to count as affirmative so long as it was expressed by a sentence of the form 'all A is B,' can always be rewritten in the form of a negative existential. And there are many other instances in which the same difficulty would arise.

To this it may be objected that what is proved by such examples is not that the use of our syntactical criterion allows the same statement to be both affirmative and negative, but merely that it allows certain affirmative and negative statements to be logically equivalent. According to this argument, the English sentences "Mt. Everest is the highest mountain in the world" and "there is no mountain in the world which is as high as Mt. Everest" do not express the same statement. The statements which they are used to make may be logically equivalent to one another, but they

are not identical. But now if we ask by what criterion it is decided that these are two different statements we find that it is again syntactical. The reason for saying that the statements, though equivalent, are not identical is just that they are expressed by sentences of different forms. And on this basis, indeed, the objection can be sustained. The use of a syntactical criterion for distinguishing between affirmative and negative statements does not lead to the conclusion that the same statement may be both affirmative and negative, if it be also understood that when two sentences are of different forms they cannot express the same statement. And if we make the further assumption, which there seems no reason to deny, that we can draw up a list of the negative forms of expression that figure in a given language, then, with respect to that language at least, we can after all obtain an unambiguous characterization of negative statements. But what would be the point of this procedure? All that we should in fact be doing would be to christen a certain form of sentence. In virtue of their forms, certain sentences will be labelled negative, and other sentences affirmative. And since it would not follow that the bestowal of these different labels reflected any differences of meaning, the distinction which they served to make would be merely grammatical. But when philosophers contrast affirmative with negative statements, the distinction with which they are concerned applies not to the grammatical form of different sentences but to the different ways in which they are used.

The attempt, which is sometimes made, to distinguish between affirmative and negative statements on psychological grounds is equally unsatisfactory. It is supposed that there is a special class of statements which are made only in rebuttal of other statements, and these statements, which are construed as expressing the mental attitude of denial, are accordingly classified as negative. But the fact is that any statement whatsoever may figure in discourse either as a rebuttal of another statement or as one that is itself rebutted. If someone says that it is raining, I may indeed contradict him by saying that it is not, but equally, if he says that it is not raining, I may contradict him by saying that it is. Bradley, who was an exponent of the view under discussion, appears to have thought that a negative form of expression was used only to mark the fact that some other statement, itself to be classified as affirmative, was discovered, or at any rate believed, to be false. As he characteristically put it, "What negation must begin with is the attempt on reality, the baffled approach of a qualification."[1] But once again,

[1] *The Principles of Logic*, Vol. I, p. 115.

any statement whatsoever which is seriously put forward may be picturesquely described as an attempt to qualify reality; and if the statement turns out to be false the attempt may be said to have been baffled. No special class of statements is marked out in this way. It is indeed the case that certain pairs of statements are mutually contradictory, and when one member of such a pair is asserted it may be allowed that the other is being implicitly denied. But this is not to say that for either to be asserted it is necessary that the other should have been previously considered. From the fact that someone asserts that it is not raining one is not entitled to infer that he has ever supposed, or that anyone has ever suggested, that it is, any more than from the fact that someone asserts that it is raining one is entitled to infer that he has ever supposed, or that anyone has ever suggested, that it is not. No doubt negative forms of expression are very frequently used to deny some previous suggestion; it may even be that this is their most common use. But whatever the interest of this fact it cannot be the ground of any viable distinction between different types of statement.

What seems a more promising approach is to try to define negation semantically, in terms of the truth-tables. Thus, it might be suggested that, in a two-valued logic, in which every statement had either the truth-value 1 or 0 but not both, the negation of a given statement S could be defined as a statement which had the truth-value 1 if S had the truth-value 0, and the truth-value 0 if S had the truth-value 1. Professor Quine, for example, says that the meaning of negation is summed up in the laws: "the negation of a true statement is false; the negation of a false statement is true."[2] But to this there is the obvious objection that if S in fact has the truth-value 1, then, according to this definition, every false statement will have to count as its negation, and if S has in fact the truth-value 0, every true statement will have to count as its negation. The familiar view that the negation of a given statement is a truth-function of the statement which is negated must, if it is to be acceptable, be taken as implying something more than that the two statements have opposite truth-values. What is required in any such case, where one statement is said to be a truth-function of another, is that its truth or falsehood shall be dependent on the truth or falsehood of the other. But this dependence cannot be construed simply as a concomitant variation, for the sufficient reason that the truth-value of a statement does not vary. It has the truth-value that it has. In a two-valued logic, either it is true or it is false.

[2] *Methods of Logic*, p. 2.

This difficulty can, however, be avoided if we construe the dependence as logical. For, dealing with a two-valued logic, we can then define the negation of a given statement S as being any statement T which is so related to S that if either has the truth-value 1 it follows that the other has the truth-value 0, and if either has the truth-value 0 it follows that the other has the truth-value 1. Neither need we restrict ourselves to a two-valued logic. If we are interested in a three-valued logic, such as that developed by Tarski and Lukasiewicz,[3] in which every statement has one, but not more than one, of the truth-values 1, 0, and ½, we can define the negation of a given statement S as being any statement T which is so related to S that if either has the value 1 it follows that the other has the value 0, if either has the value 0 it follows that the other has the value 1, and if either has the value ½ it follows that the other has the value ½. And this procedure can be generalized so as to apply to systems with any number of values. For, whatever be the number n, between 0 and 1 inclusive, which is assigned as a truth-value to a given statement S, the negation of S can be defined as any statement T which is so related to S that if either has the value n it follows that the other has the value $1\text{-}n$. For our present purposes, however, these multi-valued systems may be disregarded, since whatever interpretations may be found for the so-called truth-values that figure in them, it can hardly be that they are measurements of truth; so that what is therein defined as negation, though the definition be entirely legitimate with respect to the relevant system, will not correspond to anything that would ordinarily be understood by the term. In the case of the two-valued calculus, on the other hand, there is no difficulty in interpreting the values 1 and 0 as truth and falsehood, respectively, and consequently no strong reason for objecting to the definition of negation on the grounds of its discrepancy with ordinary usage. It may, indeed, be doubted whether our practice is entirely consistent in this matter. It would seem, for example, that we usually uphold, but sometimes also disregard, the law of the excluded middle. There are cases where we are not, on the whole, disposed to say of two incompatible statements that either one is true, or that either one is false, supposing, for example, that they contain some definite description which is not satisfied. And in such cases it might be held that our actual usage was more closely reflected in a three-valued logic, where the assignment of the value ½ was taken as implying, not that a statement might be literally a half-truth, but that it might be a non-starter, in the

[3] *Vide*, Lewis and Langford, *Symbolic Logic*, pp. 213 ff.

sense that the question of its truth or falsehood did not arise. For the most part, however, it seems a fair reflection of ordinary usage to identify the negation of S with any statement T which is so related to S that if either is true it follows that the other is false and if either is false it follows that the other is true.

In saying that this definition of negation conforms to ordinary usage, I am suggesting only that it specifies the conditions under which it would be proper to say that two statements negated one another; and I should claim, in support of this, that the expression of negations, in the sense here defined, was one, and indeed the principle, use in any given language of what would commonly be regarded as negative signs. I am not claiming, however, that it is the only use to which these signs are put. It is easy enough to find examples, in the English language at least, where the introduction into a sentence of what is counted as a negative sign does not yield the negation, in our sense, of the statement which the sentence originally expressed. Thus, prefixes like 'un-' and 'in-' count in English, in many instances, as negative signs; but to say, for example, of someone that he is ungenerous is not to negate what is expressed by saying of him that he is generous. If it is false that he is ungenerous, it does not follow that he is generous: he may be neither the one nor the other but something between the two. Again, consider the difference between saying that one is not anxious to do something and saying that one is anxious not to do something; in the first case what is expressed is the negation, in our sense, of the statement that one is anxious to do whatever it may be, but in the second case it is not; one may be neither anxious to do a thing nor anxious not to do it. What these and other such examples show is that, while the presence in an English sentence of what is counted as a negative sign does often have the effect of negating the statement which is expressed by the remainder of the sentence, this is not always so. To assume that negative signs served only to reverse the truth-values of the statements which were expressed by the sentences into which they were introduced would be to overlook some niceties of actual usage. But this does not mean that our definition of negation is inadequate. What it does show is that when one is dealing with the sentences of a natural language, such as English, the question whether the statements which they express negate one another cannot always be settled by any such mechanical procedure as counting the negative signs which they respectively contain. The fact that two English sentences, both of which express statements, differ only in the number of negative signs occurring in them is not a sufficient ground for inferring that one statement is the negation of the other.

It could no doubt be made into a sufficient ground, but only by laying down the appropriate rules for deciding what were to be regarded as negative signs.

A more serious matter is that even if our definition of negation is acceptable, it does nothing towards enabling us to delimit a class of negative statements. At best it allows us only to determine with respect to any pair of statements whether or not one is the negation of the other. The statement that London is the capital of England is not negated by the statement that Paris is the capital of France, whereas it is negated by the statement that London is not the capital of England, allowing the presupposition that there are such places. But equally the statement that London is not the capital of England is negated by the statement that it is. No doubt it is natural for us to regard the statement that London is not the capital of England as negative, if on no other ground than that the English sentence which expresses it contains the word 'not'; and for a similar reason the statement that London is the capital of England would ordinarily be treated as affirmative. But, so far as our definition takes us, there is no warrant for making this distinction between them. All that we can say is that each is the negation of the other.

But can we really go no further than this? We have got to the point where we are able to classify a set of statements as negative, provided that we are able to classify another set of statements as affirmative. And surely, it will be argued, there is no insuperable difficulty in deciding when a statement is affirmative. Considering, for the moment, only the simplest cases, we are surely entitled to say that a statement is affirmative if it refers to some particular individual and ascribes a property to it, or if it refers to a particular set of individuals and states that they stand in a certain relationship, or if it asserts that some unidentified individual, or set of individuals, answers to a certain description. No doubt there are more complicated possibilities, the existence of which would make it a laborious matter to give a complete list of all the forms of affirmative statement, and perhaps among the statements that we counted as affirmative there would be some that it would be natural to express, in English at least, by the use of negative signs. But this, it will be said, does not raise any difficulty of principle. There is no *a priori* reason why a complete list of all the forms of affirmative statement should not be given. The fundamental distinction, which is all that concerns us here, is that between affirming and denying that a certain individual has a given property, or, to use another type of language, between saying that a given property is instantiated and saying that it is not.

Now I do not say that this view of the matter is incorrect. On the contrary, I think it will be found that there is, in the end, no better way than this of differentiating between affirmative and negative statements. At the same time the distinction, here involved, between affirming and denying that an individual has a given property is not so clear as one could wish. For the proof of this we need look no further than to the traditional problem of negation.

The difficulty felt by those philosophers who have shown themselves to be puzzled by the subject of negation has not been that they failed to understand the use of negative signs. I imagine that even Parmenides, who is supposed to have proscribed negation on the ground that not-being could not be, and so to have been led to monism, was none the less able to make use of negative expressions for the purposes of ordinary communication. So long as he relied only upon the Greek language, he could not, indeed, have formulated his own thesis without them. Neither has the problem of such philosophers been to find an adequate way of characterizing the class of negative statements. They have been at a loss, not to understand what negative statements are, but only to account for their existence. Holding that the absence of a given quality is not itself a quality, nor the absence of a given relation itself a relation, they have been unable to see how it is possible that statements which merely deny to a given individual the possession of a certain quality, or to a given set of individuals the possession of a certain relation, can yet be true and verifiable. What predicate, they ask, am I applying to someone's eyes when I say only that they are not blue? What relationship am I ascribing to my cigarette case and to this table when I say that my cigarette case is not on this table? How am I characterizing reality when I say only that dodos do not exist? Since many such statements are true, there must, it is thought, be positive facts that make them so, and this would suggest that they must after all be equivalent to affirmative statements, namely to such as describe the positive facts in question. Yet the attempt to establish such equivalences generally fails. Neither will those who see this as a difficulty be satisfied by the logician's device of interpreting statements of the form 'A is not B' or 'A has not got the relation R to C', not as ascribing to A the absence of B, or to A and C the absence of R, but simply as negating the statements 'A is B' or 'A has R to C'. They may agree that this delivers them from negative qualities and relations, but only, they will complain, to subject them to negative facts. For surely, they will say, the mere failure of A to be B, or the mere failure of A and C to be related by R,

is no more a genuine fact than not-B is a genuine quality, or not-R a genuine relation. If I say that the Mediterranean sea is blue, I am referring to an individual object and ascribing a quality to it: my statement, if it is true, states a positive fact. But if I say that the Atlantic is not blue, though I am again referring to an individual, I am not ascribing any quality to it; and while, if my statement is true, there must be some positive fact which makes it so, it cannot, so the argument runs, be the fact that the Atlantic is not blue, since this is not positive, and so, strictly speaking, is not a fact at all. Thus it would seem either that the apparently negative statement is somehow doing duty for one that is affirmative, or that it is made true, if it is true, by some fact which it does not state. And it is thought that both alternatives are paradoxical.

If this problem has a somewhat artificial air the reason may be that it makes too much of the distinction between affirming and denying that an individual has a certain quality. Why should it not be allowed that the statement that the Atlantic ocean is not blue is as much a description of the Atlantic as the statement that the Mediterranean sea is blue is a description of the Mediterranean? Admittedly, it is not so informative a description. In saying only that the Atlantic is not blue, I am not saying what color it is, although, as I shall argue presently, even this might be disputed if we were in the habit of using a single word to stand for any color other than blue. But to say that a description is relatively uninformative is not to say that it is not a description at all. As for the difficulty about positive facts, I do not know how a positive fact is to be defined except as that which is described by some affirmative statement. But, if this is so, to say that negative statements do not state positive facts is merely a way of saying that they are negative, and not affirmative. It does not follow that, in the event of their being true, they are not as closely related to fact as any other true statements. No doubt reality is positive in the trivial sense that things are what they are. But then it remains to be shown that there are any true empirical statements that are not, in this sense, descriptive of reality. Surely, if we are to speak in this way, all statements become positive. To say what things are not is itself a way of saying what they are. And conversely, to say what things are is itself a way of saying what they are not.

This point can be developed further. The fact is that every significant predicate has a limited range of application. Its correct use is determined both by the fact that there is a set of occasions to which it applies and by the fact that there is a set of

occasions to which it does not apply. This being so, it must always be possible to find, or introduce, a predicate which is complementary to the predicate in question, either, in the wide sense, as applying to all and only those occasions to which it does not apply, or, in a narrower sense, as applying to all and only the occasions of this sort that fall within a certain general range. In the narrower sense, at least, such pairs of complementary predicates are actually to be met with in ordinary speech. 'Odd' and 'even,' 'long' and 'short,' 'near' and 'far,' 'light' and 'dark,' 'wet' and 'dry,' 'hot' and 'cold,' 'well and 'ill' are among the more obvious examples. And if it be objected that some of these are not perfect examples, since they leave room for intermediate cases, the answer is that they can always be made so by a suitable adjustment in the meaning of the words concerned. This is not to say, indeed, that we can ever make our language so precise that we can be sure *a priori* that no further occasion will furnish another intermediate case; but whenever such a case arises, we can always deal with it by expanding the range of one or other of the complementary predicates which are, as it were, competing for it. It is not, therefore, an objection to the existence of complementary predicates that the delimitation of their ranges may be a subject of boundary disputes.

But whatever be the worth of the examples of complementary predicates which one might claim to have discovered in the English, or some other, natural language, the fact which at present concerns us is that they are likely to be rare. In the case of most words which are used as predicates, the only means that we have for designating the properties that would be designated by their complementary predicates is to use the words themselves in combination with a negative sign. There is no English word that is related to 'blue' as 'wet' is related to 'dry.' If we want to say of anything that it has, even in the narrow sense in which only color is in question, the complementary property to blue, we have to be content with saying that it is not blue. But this fact about the English language is surely not a reason for regarding the property of not being blue as any less genuine a property than its complement of being blue. And if it is the negative form of expression that worries us, we can very easily get rid of it. All that we need to do is to invent a number of new words. Thus, to adapt a suggestion of F. P. Ramsey's, we might, in the cases where a word which is used predicatively has no complement in our language, make good the deficiency by writing its letters in the reverse order. Instead of saying that something is not blue we may decide to say that it is eulb. And if it be objected that being eulb is still a

negative predicate, since it is merely equivalent to not being blue, the answer may be that it is just as little, or just as much, a negative predicate as being blue itself is. Being eulb is the complement of being blue, and being blue is the complement of being eulb.

But still, it will be argued, there is an important difference between them. Blueness is a 'true universal': its instances have something positive in common, they share the common character of being blue. Eulbness, on the other hand, is not a true universal: its instances have nothing positive in common; all that unites them is that they fail to instantiate blueness. Even if we restrict the field to color the same objection holds; for while all the instances of eulbness will then have it at least in common that they are all colored, this will not suffice to make eulbness a true universal. The instances of blueness themselves are instances of color, so that if all that the instances of eulbness have in common is that they are colored, there is no way of differentiating them from anything within the given field that is not an instance of eulbness, except, once again, their mere failure to be blue. But the answer to this is that what they have further in common is precisely that they are eulb, just as what the instances of blueness have in common is that they are blue. I know of no criterion for deciding whether things have something in common other than that some predicate applies to them, and I know of no criterion for deciding whether something is a genuine predicate other than that there is a limited range of things to which it applies. And on this count being eulb is just as good a property as being blue. It is, indeed, a less specific property, which is, perhaps, a ground for treating it as negative. But to say that what the instances of eulbness have in common is relatively unspecific is not to say that they have nothing in common at all.

Even so, it will be said, there is a difference between blue and not-blue, which is not merely a difference of meaning or of specificity, and this difference is not removed by any such whimsical procedure as simply calling what is not blue 'eulb.' The use of 'not-blue' presupposes the use of 'blue' in a way that the use of 'blue' does not presuppose the use of 'not-blue.' We can teach someone the use of the word 'blue' by pointing to instances of the property for which it stands: if the instances are numerous and varied he may come to understand what blueness is even though he has not yet learned the use of any negative signs. But we cannot in this way teach anyone the use of 'not-blue.' In order to understand what is meant by 'not-blue' he must not only have learned the use of a negative sign but also know what is meant by 'blue.' But why, I ask, must this be so? Even if, in practice, it always

is so, it is not difficult at least to envisage a counter-example. Imagine a community the members of which are for some reason unconcerned with differences of color. The only color of special interest to them is the color blue, to which they attach a magical significance. For all other colors they use a single word, let us say the word 'eulb.' They also have a word for blue, but because blue things are sacred, the word is never used except in the course of certain ceremonies to which only the initiated are admitted. Children are taught the use of the word 'eulb' ostensively, but not the use of the word which stands for blue. They learn to refer to blue objects, which, let us further assume, they are seldom if ever allowed to see, simply as not being eulb. Thus it is 'eulb' that they regard as the positive predicate; and if they are disposed to be philosophers and iconoclasts it may even be imagined that when, at the initiation ceremony, they are finally taught the use of the word for blue, they protest that this property of blueness to which their elders attach so much importance is not a true universal, that it is nothing but the property of not being eulb. This supposition is fanciful, but not, I think, even psychologically, let alone logically, impossible.

A consequence of the fact that predicates such as 'eulb' are relatively unspecific is that they may comprehend predicates such as 'red' and 'green,' which, though not complementary, since the non-application of one does not entail the application of the other, are nevertheless mutually exclusive, inasmuch as the application of either does entail the non-application of the other. It follows, then, with regard to any such set of merely exclusive predicates, that each is comprehended in the complementary predicates of all the others. But this, it has been argued, leads to a contradiction, on the ground, to quote Cook Wilson, that "if a universal is a differentiation of two different universals, either the two are related themselves as true genus and species, or they mutually involve one another, so that each necessitates the others."[4] Now, if we were obliged to hold that either of the complementary predicates to 'blue' and 'green' entailed the other, let alone that each entailed the other, we should certainly be involved in contradiction; for it can easily be shown that if this were so the same thing might be, in the one case, both blue and not blue and, in the other, both green and not green. But why should we have to make any such assumption? No reason has been given for supposing that just because the complementary predicates to 'blue' and 'green' have a number of other predicates, such as 'brown' and 'red' and 'yellow,' subsumed under them both, they must therefore stand in

[4] *Statement and Inference*, Vol. I, p. 254.

any relation of logical necessitation to one another. And if it be alleged that this is true of all universals that have any common specification, the answer may be that it is just such cases as these that provide a counter-example.

So far we have been considering only the case of so-called negative predicates, and have in fact taken only qualities for our examples, but the argument extends also to relations. It extends, indeed, still further, to the cases where what is understood to be negated is not a predicate but a statement as a whole. For just as every predicate has, or can be made to have, its complementary, so does every statement. Setting aside necessary and self-contradictory statements, which raise problems of their own that I shall not now go into, it is true of statements, as it is of predicates, that they are meaningful if and only if they have a limited range of application. And here I am using the word 'range' in such a way that the range of a statement is to be understood to cover every possible set of circumstances in which the statement holds. That is to say, it comprises everything which is described by any story, however long, in which the statement can consistently figure. The appearance of the word 'consistently' at this point may indeed provoke an accusation of circularity; but I should meet this by saying that I am not employing it to define my concept of range but merely to explain its use. In one sense, then, the range of a statement is indefinitely extensive, but in another sense it is limited, since there are indefinitely many sets of circumstances that fall outside it, namely all those that are described by any story in which the statement cannot consistently figure. Any two statements are mutually exclusive if and only if neither can comprehend the other in any description of its range. Any two statements are complementary if and only if each comprises in its range the ranges of all the statements which are exclusive of the other. It follows that a pair of statements cannot be complementary without being mutually exclusive, although they can be mutually exclusive without being complementary.

Of any two statements which are not mutually exclusive it may be said that each is a partner in the range of the other. Clearly no statement can have as a partner any statement which is complementary to it, but it can have as partners many statements which are complementary to one another. In this sense, the range of a statement may be largely indeterminate. Suppose now that, reviewing the range of a statement S, we eliminate from its partnership all those statements of which it is true both that they do not entail S and that their complements are also partners in the range of S. What we then obtain I shall call the narrow, or determi-

nate, range of the statement in question: and this, I think, can be identified with what the statement itself describes.

I believe that this distinction between the narrower and the wider, or more and less determinate, range of a statement may help to elucidate a question which has troubled some philosophers, the question why certain statements are mutually incompatible and others not. There is, of course, no problem once it is established that two statements are complementary, or even exclusive; for then it follows analytically that they are incompatible. What is found puzzling is not that statements which are mutually complementary or exclusive should be incompatible, but that certain statements only should be mutually complementary or exclusive. Again, there appears to be no problem when the fact that one statement is the negation of another is revealed by the occurrence in the appropriate sentence of a negative sign. The difficulty is thought to arise in the cases where the incompatibility of different statements is due to the incompatibility of certain predicates: for the most part these are cases in which the statements are not complementary but only mutually exclusive.

Now, whenever two statements are different in meaning without being incompatible, it will be found that each comprises in its wider range the narrow range of the other, and the narrow range not only of the other but of any statement which is complementary to the other. That is to say, each is non-committal with respect to the circumstances concerning which the other is committed. And this may come about in two ways. Either the reference of the two statements may be different, or, having the same reference, they may be concerned with different aspects of the occasion to which they refer. In a non-referential language no two statements to the effect that different predicates are instantiated are ever incompatible, even though the predicates themselves may be. Incompatibility of statements arises only when it is said that each of two incompatible predicates is co-instantiated with some predicate which is itself uniquely instantiated, or when it is said that each of two incompatible predicates is instantiated and that at least one of them is universally instantiated; the mention of unique, or universal, instantiation is a means, and indeed in such a language the only means, of securing identity of reference. In a referential language, that is, a language which possesses the means of designating individuals, it is again only where there is identity of reference that statements can be incompatible; but here it is more easily secured.

What may seem curious is that the converse does not hold, that statements with different meanings but the same reference

can be compatible. And the explanation of this is just that the account which they severally give of the occasion to which they refer is incomplete. If there were a language, as I suppose there might be, which was capable of expressing only such statements as were committal with respect to every property that could be assigned, in the language, to the individuals to which they referred, the statements which were made in it would not admit of any distinction between their wider and narrower ranges, other than the limitations of their reference. Within its field of reference every statement would have only its narrow, or determinate, range, and the result would be that if any two statements with the same reference had different meanings it would follow that they were incompatible. Consider, for example, a pictorial language regarding which there is a convention that every picture purports to represent every feature of the occasion to which it refers. A picture has meaning only as a whole; no section of any picture is independently meaningful. In such a case, if every picture with the same reference tells a different story, each will be incompatible with all the others, and, provided always that they do have the same reference, their incompatibility will follow simply from the difference in their meanings. If this does not obtain in our language, it is because its universe of discourse is so extensive that a statement seldom, if ever, has any pretension to describe all the features of the occasion to which it refers. It is only sections of pictures that we normally aspire to paint.

Pursuing this analogy, we can now explain why certain predicates are mutually incompatible and others not. The difficulty felt by those who regard this as a problem is that they do not see how such a statement as that the same thing cannot be both blue and red all over can be interpreted as an empirical generalization or as a truth of logic: it seems to them, in Russell's words, that "red and blue are no more *logically* incompatible than red and round."[5] Accordingly, they are led to the conclusion that such incompatibilities lie in the nature of things, that the statements which assert them are synthetic *a priori* truths. But the answer is that the incompatibility, whether or not we care to call it logical, is at any rate semantic. The reason why 'red' and 'blue' are incompatible is that, each meaning what it does and not what is meant by the other, they compete for the same part of the picture. The reason why 'red' and 'round,' though their meanings again are different, are yet not incompatible is that each is non-committal with respect to that part of the picture for which the other com-

[5] *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, p. 82.

petes. If there were no distinction between the wide and narrow ranges of such predicates, the anomaly would disappear; the incompatibility of any two predicates would simply follow from the difference in their meanings. Again, this can be very simply illustrated. Imagine a universe of discourse restricted to a single homogeneous individual and the four properties, red, blue, round, and square. Then the facts are either that this individual is round and red, or that it is square and blue, or that it is square and red, or that it is round and blue; and of the four statements that can be made about it, that it is red, that it is blue, that it is round, and that it is square, the first pair will be incompatible with each other but each merely different from either of the second pair, and the second pair will be incompatible with each other but each merely different from either of the first. But now suppose that the language admits no predicates that only partially describe its universe. It will then have as simple, unanalysable predicates, not 'blue' 'red' 'round' 'square,' to which under this condition no meaning can be attached, but 'blue-round' 'red-round' 'red-square' and 'blue-square.' Four statements can still be made about the individual, but each will now be incompatible with all the others, and it will be so simply for the reason that it has a different meaning. But why, it may be asked, should 'red-blue' and 'round-square' not also be simple predicates in this language? The answer is that there is nothing in this universe of discourse for them to stand for. One could, indeed, give a meaning to such expressions, and a meaning not far removed from ordinary English usage. One might, for example, decide to call something red-blue when its color was red shot with blue, or to describe a figure with curved sides of equal length as a round square: more simply, one might decide to apply the term 'red-blue' to an object one part of which was red and another part blue and the term 'round-square' to an object one part of which was round and another part square. But assuming that the words 'red' 'blue' 'round' and 'square' are used as they normally are in English, and that they are used to characterize the color or shape of some individual as a whole, the combinations 'red-blue' and 'round-square' are inadmissible only because the different predicates which they combine range determinately over the same circumstances. For, to revert to our analogy, just as it is true of any picture as a whole, so is it true of every section of a picture that "it is what it is and not another thing." It cannot be both what it is and something different as well.

Regarding incompatibility as a logical relation and assuming, mistakenly, that if two predicates are incompatible one or other of

them must be complex, logicians, such as Wittgenstein and Carnap, have held that all basic, or atomic, statements must be logically independent of one another, from which it follows that no two basic predicates which can be significantly applied to the same individual can be incompatible. Now so long as we consider only those basic statements which are true, it does indeed follow, on the assumption that none of them is complex, that they are all logically independent of one another. But the class of true basic statements is not the whole class of basic statements; we must allow also for the possibility that some of them are false. And if we insist that, whether they are true or false, all basic statements must remain compatible, we obtain the awkward consequence that no basic statement can be falsified by the verification of any other. And since it is assumed that the truth or falsehood of all higher level statements depends upon the truth or falsehood of these basic statements, it will also follow that while the establishment of any higher level statement, through the verification of the appropriate basic statements, entails the rejection of its complementary, it does not entail the rejection of any statement of which it is no more than exclusive. Even though m and n are different numbers, from the fact that some quantity is found by observation to have exactly the value m, it will by no means follow that it does not also have exactly the value n; for the basic statements which are the only means of establishing either that it has the value m or that it has the value n will *ex hypothesi* not be incompatible. On this view the falsification of a basic statement will consist simply in not finding that a certain predicate applies to a given individual. It will never consist in finding that some other predicate does apply to it, not even the predicate which is its complementary. For either this complementary predicate is itself basic, which contradicts the assumption that no two basic predicates are incompatible, or it is not basic, in which case it can apply to the individual only if some basic predicate applies to it; but whatever basic predicate does apply to it the predicate originally in question will *ex hypothesi* not be excluded. A language which obeyed these rulings could, indeed, be constructed, but it would be a poor language inasmuch as it would afford no means of describing the aspect of a situation which falsified a basic statement in any more specific way than by saying only that the statement was false. Correspondingly, it may be regarded as a defect in a non-referential language that of the statements which can be made in it only those which state that some particular property is uniquely, or universally, instantiated can strictly be refuted. An indefinite existence statement, to the effect merely that some property is instantiated, cannot be falsi-

fied. A decision may be taken to abandon such a statement when a certain situation fails to disclose the property in question. But since the situation which is taken as relevant cannot be definitely referred to in the statement, such a decision will always be to some extent arbitrary. The situation may itself be described as consisting in the instantiation of some predicate; but from the fact that one predicate is instantiated it can never logically follow that any other is not.

I hope that this discussion has thrown some light upon the question of incompatibility. It was partly with this in view that I introduced my concept of the range of statements and defined their complementarity in terms of it. I could, however, have chosen a very much simpler way of defining complementarity. Having already defined negation, we can say that two statements are complementary if and only if each is the negation of the other.

What we have still not done is to delimit a class of negative statements. On the contrary, the main tendency of the argument has been to reduce the distinction between affirmative and negative statements to a matter of emphasis. A statement is negative if it states that an object lacks a certain property rather than stating that it possesses the complementary property: a statement is negative if it states that a certain property is not instantiated, rather than stating that the complementary property is universally instantiated. The objection remains that, on this showing, the same statement may be both affirmative and negative, or, at least, that affirmative and negative statements may be logically equivalent: but perhaps this is a conclusion that we just have to accept.

If we insist on making a clear-cut distinction between affirmative and negative statements, the best course that I can see open to us is to base the distinction upon degrees of specificity. Let us say of any two singular referential statements S and S′, that is, statements which refer to a particular individual and ascribe some property to it, that S is a specifier of S′ if and only if S′ is not a component of S, S entails S′, and S′ does not entail S. And let us say that a singular referential statement S is absolutely specific, with respect to a given language L, if there is no statement expressible in L which is a specifier of S. Further let us say that a statement has the first degree of specificity, with respect to a language L, if it is not absolutely specific but has no specifiers expressible in L which are not themselves absolutely specific, that it has the second degree of specificity if it is not absolutely specific, or specific to the first degree, but has no specifiers which are not themselves absolutely specific or specific to the first degree, and so on. Then among complementary pairs of singular referential

statements it may happen that one member of the pair has a higher, that is, a lesser, degree of specificity than the other. In that case the more specific statement may be said to be affirmative and the less specific to be negative. Thus, while for the members of our imaginary tribe the statement that an object was blue would not be more specific than the statement that it was eulb, to say in English that an object is blue is to make a more specific statement than to say that it is not blue; for whereas the statement that an object is not blue is specified by such statements as that it is red, or that it is green, or that it is colorless, the statement that it is blue is not specified by any statements at this level. Accordingly the statement that the object is blue counts, with respect to the English language, as affirmative by this criterion, and the statement that it is not blue is negative.

Having in this way formed the class of affirmative singular referential statements as being all and only those that, with respect to a given language, are more specific than their complementaries, we can extend the distinction to other types of statement. An existential statement may be said to be affirmative if and only if it is entailed by an affirmative singular referential statement. A universal, or particular, statement may be said to be affirmative if and only if the singular referential statements which are obtained from it by giving values to its variables are affirmative. The class of negative statements, with respect to a given language, may then be held to consist of all and only those statements that have affirmative statements for their complementaries.

I think that the results which are yielded by this criterion agree fairly closely with the assessment of statements, as affirmative or negative, that one would intuitively make. There are, however, certain anomalies. For example, the statement that an object is colored will have to count as negative: for it is less specific than the statement that the object is colorless. Furthermore, not every member of every pair of complementary statements will fall under either classification. To revert to our original example, the statement that Mt. Everest is the highest mountain in the world is not, I think, either more or less specific than the statement that Mt. Everest is not the highest mountain in the world: and if this is so we shall have to allow that neither statement is either affirmative or negative. And if there are any predicates which are not excluded by predicates other than those which are complementary to them, then the statements which consist in the ascription to individuals of the properties for which these predicates and their complementaries stand will also escape the classification. They will, according to our criterion, be neither affirmative nor negative.

If 'not high' were a synonym for 'low,' or 'not long' for 'short,' or 'not wet' for 'dry,' then statements, made in English, to the effect that something was, or was not, high or long or wet would be examples.

In view of such considerations it may appear preferable not to make their comparative lack of specificity a defining property of negative statements, but merely to regard it as a property which most of them do in fact possess. The point is in any case important, as it accounts for the belief that negative statements are somehow less directly related to fact than affirmative statements are. They are less directly related to fact just in so far as they are less specific. From a psychological point of view, a negative statement may be directly verified. An observer may discover the absence of something which particularly concerns him, without noting the presence of anything else. Being interested only in the truth of the negative statement, he may not consciously apprehend the truth of any more specific statement on which the truth of the negative statement depends. But logically a negative statement, assuming it to be relatively unspecific, can be verified only through the truth of some more specific statement which entails it; a statement which will itself, by contrast, be counted as affirmative. Neither, as has often been remarked, are negative statements, when characterized in this way, reducible to affirmatives. They are not equivalent to a disjunction of the more specific statements which entail them, even though the disjunction be finite. To secure the equivalence one needs the additional statement that these are all the alternatives that there are.

In the same way we can account for the inclination that many people have towards saying that reality is positive. The explanation is that any information which is provided by a less specific statement will always be included in the information provided by some more specific statement. Given a finite universe, we could, within the resources of the language, give a complete description of it by using only absolutely specific statements, such statements counting as affirmative. If at any point a less specific, negative, statement were substituted for one of these affirmatives, the description, though it might remain true, would cease to be complete. Some information, expressible in the language, would have been left out. It is, however, to be remarked that while, with only absolutely specific statements at our disposal, we could give a complete description of such a universe, we could not with these means say that it was complete.

A. J. AYER

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON

INDEX

NAMES OF CONTRIBUTORS ARE PRINTED IN SMALL CAPITALS

Achievement versus Values of Enjoyment (Values of—).—MAX RIESER. 685.

Aesthetic Object (More on Professor Pepper's Theory of the—).—JAMES L. JARRETT. 475.

Aesthetic Object (On Professor Jarrett's Questions about the—).—STEPHEN C. PEPPER. 633.

Aesthetic Work of Art (Further Consideration of the—).—STEPHEN C. PEPPER. 274.

AIKEN, HENRY DAVID: Review of Kurtz, *The Problems of Value Theory*. 789.

AIKEN, HENRY DAVID: The Role of Conventions in Ethics. 173.

ALDRICH, VIRGIL C.: Review of Rapoport, *Science and the Goals of Man: a Study in Semantic Orientation*. 429.

ALLAN, D. MAURICE: Towards a Natural Teleology. 449.

Alleged Privacy (The) of Experience.—JUSTUS HARTNACK. 405.

AMBROSE, ALICE: Linguistic Approaches to Philosophical Problems. 289.

AMES, VAN METER: Review of Warbeke, *The Power of Art*. 397.

AMES, VAN METER: The Zenith as Ideal. 201.

Analytic Principle (An) of Induction?—MAY BRODBECK. 747.

ANDERSON, FULTON H.: Review of *Plato's Phaedrus*, tr. by Hackforth. 532.

Argument ad Hominem (Philosophy and—).—HENRY W. JOHNSTONE, JR. 489.

Art (Further Consideration of the Aesthetic Work of—).—STEPHEN C. PEPPER. 274.

Auer, J. A. C. Fagginger, and Hartt, Julian, *Humanism versus Theism*. Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 21.

Authority (Santayana and Realistic Conceptions of—).—HERBERT W. SCHNEIDER. 214.

AYER, A. J.: Negation. 797.

BAKAN, MILDRED B.: Logical Inference and Being. 713.

Balz, Albert G. A., *Cartesian Studies*. Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 54.

BEALS, LAWRENCE W.: On Appearing Just and Being Unjust. 607.

Beauty and Interestingness.—FRANCIS S. HASEROT. 261.

"Beauty and Interestingness" (Professor Haserot on—).—LAWRENCE E. DRONE. 783.

BECK, LEWIS WHITE: Review of Martin, *Immanuel Kant. Ontologie und Wissenschaftstheorie*. 424.

"Being" (Heidegger's).—J. GLENN GRAY. 415.

Being (Logical Inference and—).—MILDRED B. BAKAN. 713.

Biemel, Walter, *Le Concept du Monde chez Heidegger*. Review by E. LA B. CHERBONNIER. 255.

Blau, Joseph L., *Men and Movements in American Philosophy*. Review by MAX H. FISCH. 675.

BLAU, JOSEPH L.: Review of Miller, *Christopher Pearse Cranch and His Caricatures of New England Transcendentalism*. 22.

BLAU, JOSEPH L.: Review of Persons, ed., *Evolutionary Thought in America*. 48.

BLAU, JOSEPH L.: Review of *Social Behavior and Personality. Contributions of W. I. Thomas to Theory and Social Research*, ed. by Edmund H. Volkart. 479.

BOAS, GEORGE: Review of Broad, *Ethics and the History of Philosophy; Selected Essays*. 762.

BOAS, GEORGE: Review of Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. 244.

BOAS, GEORGE: Review of Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature*. 247.

Bocheński, I. M., *Ancient Formal Logic*. Review by ERNEST A. MOODY. 641.

Bocheński, I. M., *Der sowjetrussische dialektische Materialismus (Diamat)*. Review by GEORGE L. KLINE. 123.

Boynton, Richard W., *Beyond Mythology: A Challenge to Dogmatism in Religion*. Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 21.

Broad, C. D., *Ethics and the History of Philosophy; Selected Essays*. Review by GEORGE BOAS. 762.

BRODBECK, MAY: An Analytic Principle of Induction? 747.

Brown, Bernard Edward, *American Conservatives: The Political Thought of Francis Lieber and John W. Burgess*. Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 23.

Buchler, Justus, *Toward a General Theory of Human Judgment*. Review by MASON W. GROSS. 758.

Campanella, Tommaso, *Opuscoli inediti*, a cura di Luigi Firpo. Review by PAUL O. KRISTELLER. 25.
CAPONIGRI, A. ROBERT: Review of Corsi, *Le origini del pensiero di Benedetto Croce*. 425.
Cassirer, Ernst, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Review by GEORGE BOAS. 244.
Categories (The) and a Logic of Structure.—HERMANN WEIN. 629.
Causal Relation (On the Definition of the—).—HERBERT A. SIMON. 517.
Causation (Philosophical Analysis, Translation Schemas, and the Regularity Theory of—).—ARTHUR PAP. 657.
Causation in History (Some Aspects of—).—E. J. TAPP. 67.
'Certainty' (The) of Professor Lewis' Expressive Statements.—CHARLES A. FRITZ, JR. 723.
CHATALIAN, GEORGE: Induction and the Problem of the External World. 601.
CHERBONNIER, E. LA B.: Review of Biemel, *Le Concept du Monde chez Heidegger*. 255.
CHISHOLM, RODERICK M.: Comments on the "Proposal Theory" of Philosophy. 301.
Cicero, *Brutus; On the Nature of the Gods; On Divination; On Duties*, tr. by Hubert M. Poteat. Review by PAUL O. KRISTELLER. 198.
City (A) in the Skies.—MARTEN TEN HOOR. 226.
CLEVE, FELIX M.: Review of Fränkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*. 307.
Comment.—BERNHARD MOLLENHAUER. 279.
Comments on the "Proposal Theory" of Philosophy.—RODERICK M. CHISHOLM. 301.
Communication: The Concept of Man and the Philosophy of Education in East and West.—KURT F. LEIDECKER. 167.
Conant, James B., *Science and Common Sense*. Review by RAPHAEL DEMOS. 11.
Conventions in Ethics (The Role of —).—HENRY DAVID AIKEN. 173.
Conze, Edward, *Buddhism*. Review by CLARENCE H. HAMILTON. 652.
Cornforth, Maurice, *In Defence of Philosophy against Postitivism and Pragmatism*. Review by ERNEST NAGEL. 648.
Corsi, Mario, *Le origini del pensiero di Benedetto Croce*. Review by A. ROBERT CAPONIGRI. 425.
Criteria of Explanation in History—E. W. STRONG. 57.
Culture Analysis (Historical Interpretation and—).—HORACE L. FRIESS. 340.
CUMMING, ROBERT: Review of Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua: The Defender of Peace. Vol. I: Marsilius of Padua and Medieval Political Philosophy*. 481.
CUMMING, ROBERT: Review of Murphy, *The Interpretation of Plato's Republic*. 595.
CUMMING, ROBERT: Review of Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government*. 45.

DANTO, A. C.: Review of Meisel, *The Genesis of Georges Sorel; an Account of His Formative Period, Followed by a Study of His Influence*. 51.
DEMOS, RAPHAEL: Review of Conant, *Science and Common Sense*. 11.
DEMOS, RAPHAEL: Review of Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I. 692.
Descartes, René, *Meditations*, tr. by Laurence J. Lafleur. Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 54.
Descartes and Hume (A Footnote on —).—LAURENCE J. LAFLEUR. 780.
Diels, Hermann, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Review by A. L. HILLIARD. 191.
Disagreement in Belief and Disagreement in Attitude (On the Tautologous Nature of Stevenson's Distinction between—).—SOLOMON E. LEVY. 177.
Dopp, Joseph, *Leçons de logique formelle*. Review by ERNEST NAGEL. 24.
DRONE, LAWRENCE E.: Professor Haserot on "Beauty and Interestingness." 783.
Ducasse, C. J., *Nature, Mind, and Death*. Review by A. G. RAMSPERGER. 239.
Dürr, Karl, *The Propositional Logic of Boethius*. Review by ERNEST A. MOODY. 641.
DYKHUIZEN, GEORGE: Review of Lodge, *Applying Philosophy*. 313.
DYKHUIZEN, GEORGE: Review of Nathanson, *John Dewey. The Reconstruction of the Democratic Life*. 478.

EARLE, WILLIAM: Mr. Wild's Ontology and Ethics. 672.
East and West (Communication: The Concept of Man and the Philosophy of Education in—).—KURT F. LEIDECKER. 167.
EDEL, ABRAHAM: Review of Joachim, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics. A Commentary*. 484.

Ekman, Rolf, *Vilhelm Ekelund och Nietzsche.* Review by ALMA LUISE OLSON. 428.
Empiricism: A Reply to Messrs. Lovejoy and Hook (In Defense of Individualistic—).—VICTOR LOWE. 100.
Empiricism (Mindless—).—SIDNEY HOOK. 89.
Encyclopaedisch Handboek Van Het Moderne Denken. Review by MARTEN TEN HOOR. 311.
Essence and Existence in George Santayana.—CELESTINE J. SULLIVAN, JR. 220.
Ethics (Mr. Wild's Ontology and—).—WILLIAM EARLE. 672.
Ethics (The Role of Conventions in —).—HENRY DAVID AIKEN. 173.
Ethics (Tendency: The Ontological Ground of—).—JOHN WILD. 461.
Ethics and Explanation.—JOHN LADD. 499.
Euthyphro, Mill, and Mr. Lewis.—ALBERT L. HAMMOND. 377.
Existence in George Santayana (Essence and—).—CELESTINE J. SULLIVAN, JR. 220.
Experience (The Alleged Privacy of —).—JUSTUS HARTNACK. 405.
Experience (The Logic of—).—RICHARD D. MOSIER. 411.
Explanation in History (Criteria of —).—E. W. STRONG. 57.
External World (Induction and the Problem of the—).—GEORGE CHATALIAN. 601.

Feibleman, James K., *Ontology.* Review by THOMAS A. GOUDE. 537.
FEN, SING-NAN: Has James Answered Hume? 159.
FERRATER-MORA, JOSÉ: Comments on the Symposium "What Is Philosophy of History?" 350.
FEUER, LEWIS S.: What Is Philosophy of History? 329.
Fiction (Plausibility in—).—ROBERT T. HARRIS. 5.
FISCH, MAX H.: Review of Blau, *Men and Movements in American Philosophy.* 675.
Flying Saucers.—B. A. G. FULLER. 455.
Footnote (A) on Descartes and Hume.—LAURENCE J. LAFLEUR. 780.
FRANKEL, CHARLES: Review of Windolph, *Leviathan and Natural Law.* 24.
Fränkel, Hermann, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums.* Review by FELIX M. CLEVE. 307.
FRÁNQUIZ, J. A.: Review of Mendoza, *Fuentes del Pensamiento de los Estados Unidos.* 285.
Freedom (Some Reflections on the Meanings of—).—JOHN L. MOTHERSHEAD, JR. 667.
Freedom (UNESCO Report on the Investigation Concerning—).—H. J. POS. 29.
FRIESS, HORACE L.: Historical Interpretation and Culture Analysis. 340.
FRITZ, CHARLES A., JR.: The 'Certainty' of Professor Lewis' Expressive Statements. 723.
Fritz, Charles A., Jr., *Bertrand Russell's Construction of the External World.* Review by MORRIS WEITZ. 786.
FULLER, B. A. G.: Flying Saucers. 455.
Further Consideration of the Aesthetic Work of Art.—STEPHEN C. PEPPER. 274.

GARLAN, EDWIN N.: Review of Hamburger, *Morals and Law: the Growth of Aristotle's Legal Theory.* 528.
Gewirth, Alan, *Marsilius of Padua: The Defender of Peace. Vol. I: Marsilius of Padua and Medieval Political Philosophy.* Review by ROBERT CUMMING. 481.
GOUDGE, THOMAS A.: Review of Feibleman, *Ontology.* 537.
GRAY, J. GLENN: Heidegger's "Being." 415.
GROSS, MASON W.: Review of Buchler, *Toward a General Theory of Human Judgment.* 758.
Guthrie, W. K. C., *The Greeks and Their Gods.* Review by GLENN R. MORROW. 136.

HADAS, MOSES: Review of Rodocanachi, *Athens and the Greek Miracle.* 25.
Hamburger, Max, *Morals and Law: the Growth of Aristotle's Legal Theory.* Review by EDWIN N. GARLAN. 528.
HAMILTON, CLARENCE H.: Review of Conze, *Buddhism.* 652.
HAMILTON, CLARENCE H.: Review of Slater, *Paradox and Nirvana.* 652.
HAMMOND, ALBERT L.: Euthyphro, Mill, and Mr. Lewis. 377.
HARRIS, ROBERT T.: Plausibility in Fiction. 5.
HART, SAMUEL L.: Review of Mukerjee, *The Dynamics of Morals.* 734.
HARTNACK, JUSTUS: The Alleged Privacy of Experience. 405.
Hartt, Julian, and Auer, J. A. C. Fagginger, *Humanism versus Theism.* Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 21.

Has James Answered Hume?—SING-NAN FEN. 159.
Has Russell Answered Hume?—HIRAM J. MCLENDON. 145.
HASEROT, FRANCIS S.: Beauty and Interestingness. 261.
Haserot on "Beauty and Interestingness" (Professor—).—LAWRENCE E. DRONE. 783.
Hayek, F. A., *The Counter-Revolution of Science; Studies on the Abuse of Reason.* Review by ERNEST NAGEL. 560.
Heidegger's "Being."—J. GLENN GRAY. 415.
Henle, Robert J., *Method in Metaphysics.* Review by P. ROMANELL. 485.
Henriksen, Aage, *Methods and Results of Kierkegaard Studies in Scandinavia.* Review by ALMA LUISE OLSON. 427.
HILLIARD, A. L.: Review of Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker.* 191.
HILLIARD, A. L.: Review of Ruyer, *Philosophie de la valeur.* 677.
HILLIARD, A. L.: Review of Wehrli, *Straton von Lampsakos.* 196.
Historical Interpretation and Culture Analysis.—HORACE L. FRIESS. 340.
History (Comments on the Symposium "What Is Philosophy of—?").—STERLING P. LAMPRECHT, JOSÉ FERRATER-MORA, MAURICE MANDELBAUM. 350.
History (Criteria of Explanation in —).—E. W. STRONG. 57.
History (Some Aspects of Causation in—).—E. J. TAPP. 67.
History (Some Neglected Philosophic Problems Regarding—).—MAURICE MANDELBAUM. 317.
History (What Is Philosophy of—)?—LEWIS S. FEUER. 329.
Hoffmann (A Personal Tribute to Ernst—).—ANNA FORBES LIDDELL. 505.
HOOK, SIDNEY: Mindless Empiricism. 89.
HOOK, SIDNEY: Not Mindful Enough. 112.
Hook (In Defense of Individualistic Empiricism: A Reply to Messrs. Lovejoy and—).—VICTOR LOWE. 100.
Hughes, H. Stuart, *Oswald Spengler; a Critical Estimate.* Review by T. FOSTER LINDLEY. 619.
Hume (A Footnote on Descartes and —).—LAURENCE J. LAFLEUR. 780.
Hume (Has James Answered—)?—SING-NAN FEN. 159.
Hume (Has Russell Answered—)?—HIRAM J. MCLENDON. 145.
In Defense of Individualistic Empiricism: A Reply to Messrs. Lovejoy and Hook.—VICTOR LOWE. 100.
Individualistic Empiricism: A Reply to Messrs. Lovejoy and Hook (In Defense of—).—VICTOR LOWE. 100.
Induction (An Analytic Principle of —)?—MAY BRODBECK. 747.
Induction (The Principle of—).—ASHER MOORE. 741.
Induction (A Re-Examination of the Problem of—).—W. DONALD OLIVER. 769.
Induction and the Problem of the External World.—GEORGE CHATALIAN. 601.
Induction (II): A Rejoinder to Miss Brodbeck (The Principle of—).—ASHER MOORE. 750.
Inference and Being (Logical—).—MILDRED B. BAKAN. 713.
Intellectualism (Note on a Not-So-Vicious—).—HERBERT W. SCHNEIDER. 121.
Intellectualism (On a Supposed Resurgence of Vicious—).—ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY. 85.

James Answered Hume (Has—)?—SING-NAN FEN. 159.
Jantz, Harold, *Goethe's Faust as a Renaissance Man: Parallels and Prototypes.* Review by WALTER A. KAUFMAN. 401.
JARRETT, JAMES L.: More on Professor Pepper's Theory of the Aesthetic Object. 475.
Jarrett's Questions about the Aesthetic Object (On Professor—).—STEPHEN C. PEPPER. 633.
Joachim, H. H., *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics. A Commentary.* Review by ABRAHAM EDEL. 484.
JOHNSTON, HENRY W., JR.: Philosophy and *Argumentum ad Hominem.* 489.
Jordan, Rudolf, *The New Perspective; an Essay.* Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 362.
Juhos, B., *Die Erkenntnis und ihre Leistung. Die naturwissenschaftliche Methode.* Review by LEROY E. LOEMKER. 82.
Just and Being Unjust (More on Appearing—).—EDITH WATSON SCHIPPER. 732.
Just and Being Unjust (On Appearing—).—LAWRENCE W. BEALS. 607.

Kastil, Alfred, *Die Philosophie Franz Brentanos. Eine Einführung in seine Lehre.* Review by V. J. MCGILL. 131.

KATZ, JOSEPH: Review of Schilling, *Geschichte der Philosophie, Erster Band.* 423.

KAUFMANN, WALTER A.: Review of Jantz, *Goethe's Faust as a Renaissance Man: Parallels and Prototypes.* 401.

KLINE, GEORGE L.: Review of Bocheński, *Der sowjetrussische dialektische Materialismus (Diamat).* 123.

KLINE, GEORGE L.: Review of Nilson, *Histoire et sciences politiques.* 252.

KNOX, ISRAEL: Review of Mayer, *A History of Ancient & Medieval Philosophy* and *A History of Modern Philosophy.* 621.

Koyré, Alexandre, *Descartes After Three Hundred Years.* Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 54.

Kraft, Victor, *Der Wiener Kreis.* Review by ERNEST NAGEL. 280.

KRISTELLER, PAUL O.: Review of Campanella, *Opuscoli inediti,* a cura di Luigi Firpo. 25.

KRISTELLER, PAUL O.: Review of Cicero, *Brutus; On the Nature of the Gods; On Divination; On Duties,* tr. by Huber M. Poteat. 198.

Kurtz, Paul W., *The Problems of Value Theory.* Review by HENRY DAVID AIKEN. 789.

LADD, JOHN: Ethics and Explanation. 499.

LADD, JOHN: Review of MacBeath, *Experiments in Living.* 614.

LAFLEUR, LAURENCE J.: A Footnote on Descartes and Hume. 780.

LAMPRECHT, STERLING P.: Comments on the Symposium "What Is Philosophy of History?" 350.

LAMPRECHT, STERLING P.: Normal Madness and the Political Life. 208.

LARRABEE, HAROLD A.: Review of Auer and Hartt, *Humanism versus Theism.* 21.

LARRABEE, HAROLD A.: Review of Balz, *Cartesian Studies.* 54.

LARRABEE, HAROLD A.: Review of Boynton, *Beyond Mythology: A Challenge to Dogmatism in Religion.* 21.

LARRABEE, HAROLD A.: Review of Brown, *American Conservatives: The Political Thought of Francis Lieber and John W. Burgess.* 23.

LARRABEE, HAROLD A.: Review of Descartes, *Meditations,* tr. by Laurence J. Lafleur. 54.

LARRABEE, HAROLD A.: Review of Jordan, *The New Perspective; an Essay.* 362.

LARRABEE, HAROLD A.: Review of Koyré, *Descartes After Three Hundred Years.* 54.

LARRABEE, HAROLD A.: Review of Stoops, *The Integrated Life.* 512.

LARRABEE, HAROLD A.: Review of Young, *The Philosophy of Henry James, Sr.* 309.

LEIDECKER, KURT F.: Communication: The Concept of Man and the Philosophy of Education in East and West. 167.

LEVY, SOLOMON E.: On the Tautologous Nature of Stevenson's Distinction between Disagreement in Belief and Disagreement in Attitude. 177.

Lewis (Euthyphro, Mill, and Mr.—). —ALBERT L. HAMMOND. 377.

Lewis' Expressive Statements (The 'Certainty' of Professor—).—CHARLES A. FRITZ, JR. 723.

LIDDELL, ANNA FORBES: A Personal Tribute to Ernst Hoffmann. 505.

LINDLEY, T. FOSTER: Review of Hughes, *Oswald Spengler; a Critical Estimate.* 619.

Linguistic Approaches to Philosophical Problems.—ALICE AMBROSE. 289.

Lodge, Rupert C., *Applying Philosophy.* Review by GEORGE DYKHUIZEN. 313.

LOEMKER, LEROY E.: Review of Juhos, *Die Erkenntnis und ihre Leistung. Die naturwissenschaftliche Methode.* 82.

LOEMKER, LEROY E.: Review of Reiner, *Pflicht und Neigung. Die Grundlagen der Sittlichkeit.* 399.

LOEMKER, LEROY E: Review of von Rintelen, *Philosophie der Endlichkeit als Spiegel der Gegenwart.* 53.

LOEMKER, LEROY E.: Review of Wein, *Das Problem des Relativismus. Philosophie im Übergang zur Anthropologie.* 81.

Logic (The) of Experience.—RICHARD D. MOSIER. 411.

Logic of Structure (The Categories and a—).—HERMANN WEIN. 629.

Logical Inference and Being.—MILDRED B. BAKAN. 713.

LOVEJOY, ARTHUR O.: On a Supposed Resurgence of Vicious Intellectualism. 85.

LOVEJOY, ARTHUR O.: Rejoinder to Mr. Lowe. 111.

Lovejoy and Hook (In Defense of Individualistic Empiricism: A Reply to Messrs.—).—VICTOR LOWE. 100.

LOWE, VICTOR: In Defense of Individualistic Empiricism: A Reply to Messrs. Lovejoy and Hook. 100.

Lowe (Rejoinder to Mr.—).—ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY. 111.

MacBeath, A., *Experiments in Living.* Review by JOHN LADD. 614.

MCGILL, V. J.: Review of Kastil, *Die Philosophie Franz Brentanos. Eine Einführung in seine Lehre.* 131.

MCGILL, V. J.: Review of Russell, *The Impact of Science on Society.* 79.

MCGILL, V. J.: Review of Russell, *Unpopular Essays.* 79.

MACK, ROBERT D.: Review of Rau, *Art and Society: A Reinterpretation of Plato.* 192.

MACK, ROBERT D.: Review of Sinclair, *The Conditions of Knowing; an Essay towards a Theory of Knowledge.* 506.

MCLENDON, HIRAM J.: Has Russell Answered Hume? 145.

MANDELBAUM, MAURICE: Comments on the Symposium "What Is Philosophy of History?" 350.

MANDELBAUM, MAURICE: Some Neglected Philosophic Problems Regarding History. 317.

Maritain, Jacques, *Philosophy of Nature.* Review by GEORGE BOAS. 247.

Martin, Gottfried, *Immanuel Kant. Ontologie und Wissenschaftstheorie.* Review by LEWIS WHITE BECK. 424.

Mayer, Frederick, *A History of Ancient & Medieval Philosophy* and *A History of Modern Philosophy.* Review by ISRAEL KNOX. 621.

Maziarz, Edward A., *The Philosophy of Mathematics.* Review by ERNEST NAGEL. 283.

Meglio, Gaetano, *La filosofia dell'Infinito.* Review by PATRICK ROMANELL. 651.

Meisel, James H., *The Genesis of Georges Sorel; an Account of His Formative Period, Followed by a Study of His Influence.* Review by A. C. DANTO. 51.

Mendoza, Angélica, *Fuentes del Pensamiento de los Estados Unidos.* Review by J. A. FRÁNQUIZ. 285.

Meta-ethics (Moral Philosophy and —).—MARY MOTHERSILL. 587.

Mill, and Mr. Lewis (Euthyphro,—). —ALBERT L. HAMMOND. 377.

Miller, F. De Wolfe, *Christopher Pearse Cranch and His Caricatures of New England Transcendentalism.* Review by JOSEPH L. BLAU. 22.

Mindless Empiricism.—SIDNEY HOOK. 89.

MOLLENHAUER, BERNHARD: Comment. 279.

MOODY, ERNEST A.: Review of Bocheński, *Ancient Formal Logic.* 641.

MOODY, ERNEST A.: Review of Dürr, *The Propositional Logic of Boethius.* 641.

MOORE, ASHER: The Principle of Induction. 741.

MOORE, ASHER: The Principle of Induction (II): A Rejoinder to Miss Brodbeck. 750.

Moral Philosophy and Meta-ethics.—MARY MOTHERSILL. 587.

More on Appearing Just and Being Unjust.—EDITH WATSON SCHIPPER. 732.

More on Professor Pepper's Theory of the Aesthetic Object.—JAMES L. JARRETT. 475.

MORROW, GLENN R.: Review of Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods.* 136.

MOSIER, RICHARD D.: The Logic of Experience. 411.

MOTHERSHEAD, JOHN L., JR.: Some Reflections on the Meanings of Freedom. 667.

MOTHERSILL, MARY: Moral Philosophy and Meta-ethics. 587.

Mr. Wild's Ontology and Ethics.—WILLIAM EARLE. 672.

Mukerjee, Radhakamal, *The Dynamics of Morals.* Review by SAMUEL L. HART. 734.

Murphy, N. R., *The Interpretation of Plato's Republic.* Review by ROBERT CUMMING. 595.

NAGEL, ERNEST: Review of Cornforth, *In Defence of Philosophy against Positivism and Pragmatism.* 648.

NAGEL, ERNEST: Review of Dopp, *Leçons de logique formelle.* 24.

NAGEL, ERNEST: Review of Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science; Studies on the Abuse of Reason.* 560.

NAGEL, ERNEST: Review of Kraft, *Der Wiener Kreis.* 280.

NAGEL, ERNEST: Review of Maziarz, *The Philosophy of Mathematics.* 283.

NAGEL, ERNEST: Review of Rosenbloom, *The Elements of Mathematical Logic.* 282.

NAGEL, ERNEST: Review of Schrödinger, *Science and Humanism; Physics in Our Time.* 539.

Nathanson, Jerome, *John Dewey. The Reconstruction of the Democratic Life.* Review by GEORGE DYKHUIZEN. 478.

Negation.—A. J. AYER. 797.

Negative Things.—RICHARD TAYLOR. 433.

Nilson, Sten Sparre, *Histoire et sciences politiques.* Review by GEORGE L. KLINE. 252.
Normal Madness and the Political Life.—STERLING P. LAMPRECHT. 208.
Not Mindful Enough.—SIDNEY HOOK. 112.
Note on a Not-So-Vicious Intellectualism.—HERBERT W. SCHNEIDER. 121.
Notes on the Pragmatic Theory of Truth.—MORELAND PERKINS. 573.

Olgiati, Francesco, *I fondamenti della filosofia classica.* Review by MARIO M. ROSSI. 283.
OLIVER, W. DONALD: A Re-Examination of the Problem of Induction. 769.
OLSON, ALMA LUISE: Review of Ekman, *Vilhelm Ekelund och Nietzsche.* 428.
OLSON, ALMA LUISE: Review of Henriksen, *Methods and Results of Kierkegaard Studies in Scandinavia.* 427.
On Appearing Just and Being Unjust.—LAWRENCE W. BEALS. 607.
On a Supposed Resurgence of Vicious Intellectualism.—ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY. 85.
On Professor Jarrett's Questions about the Aesthetic Object.—STEPHEN C. PEPPER. 633.
On the Definition of the Causal Relation.—HERBERT SIMON. 517.
On the Tautologous Nature of Stevenson's Distinction between Disagreement in Belief and Disagreement in Attitude.—SOLOMON E. LEVY. 177.
Onians, Richard Broxton, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate.* Review by FRANCIS R. WALTON. 708.

PAP, ARTHUR: Philosophical Analysis, Translation Schemas, and the Regularity Theory of Causation. 657.
Passing (The) of Privileged Uniqueness.—FREDERIC SOMMERS. 392.
PEPPER, STEPHEN C.: Further Consideration of the Aesthetic Work of Art. 274.
PEPPER, STEPHEN C.: On Professor Jarrett's Questions about the Aesthetic Object. 633.
Pepper's Theory of the Aesthetic Object (More on Professor—).—JAMES L. JARRETT. 475.
PERKINS, MORELAND: Notes on the Pragmatic Theory of Truth. 573.
Personal Tribute (A) to Ernst Hoffmann (1880–1952).—ANNA FORBES LIDDELL. 505.
Persons, Stow, ed., *Evolutionary Thought in America.* Review by JOSEPH L. BLAU. 48.
Philosophical Analysis, Translation Schemas, and the Regularity Theory of Causation.—ARTHUR PAP. 657.
Philosophical Problems (Linguistic Approaches to—).—ALICE AMBROSE. 289.
Philosophy and *Argumentum ad Hominem.*—HENRY W. JOHNSTONE, JR. 489.
Plato's Phaedrus, tr. by R. Hackforth. Review by FULTON H. ANDERSON. 532.
Plausibility in Fiction.—ROBERT T. HARRIS. 5.
Political Life (Normal Madness and the—).—STERLING P. LAMPRECHT. 208.
Pos, H. J.: UNESCO Report on the Investigation Concerning Freedom. 29.
Pragmatic Theory of Truth (Notes on the—).—MORELAND PERKINS. 573.
Principle (The) of Induction.—ASHER MOORE. 741.
Principle (The) of Induction (II): A Rejoinder to Miss Brodbeck.—ASHER MOORE. 750.
"Proposal Theory" of Philosophy (Comments on the—).—RODERICK M. CHISHOLM. 301.
Psyche (The) as Social Determinant.—JOHN W. YOLTON. 232.

RAMSPERGER, A. G.: Review of Ducasse, *Nature, Mind, and Death.* 239.
Rapoport, Anatol, *Science and the Goals of Man: a Study in Semantic Orientation.* Review by VIRGIL C. ALDRICH. 429.
Rau, Catherine, *Art and Society: A Reinterpretation of Plato.* Review by ROBERT D. MACK. 192.
Re-Examination (A) of the Problem of Induction.—W. DONALD OLIVER. 769.
Reiner, Hans, *Pflicht und Neigung. Die Grundlagen der Sittlichkeit.* Review by LEROY E. LOEMKER. 399.
Rejoinder to Mr. Lowe.—ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY. 111.
RIESER, MAX: Values of Achievement versus Values of Enjoyment. 685.
Rintelen, Fritz-Joachim von, *Philosophie der Endlichkeit als Spiegel der Gegenwart.* Review by LEROY E. LOEMKER. 53.
Rodocanachi, C. P., *Athens and the Greek Miracle.* Review by MOSES HADAS. 25.
Role (The) of Conventions in Ethics.—HENRY DAVID AIKEN. 173.

ROMANELL, P.: Review of Henle, *Method in Metaphysics.* 485.
ROMANELL, PATRICK: Review of Meglio, *La filosofia dell'Infinito.* 651.
ROMANELL, PATRICK: Review of Spadafora, *La conoscenza come approssimazione.* 650.
Romão, Mattos, *Galileu e o método científico, Vol. I.* Review by EDWARD ROSEN. 513.
ROSEN, EDWARD: Review of Romão, *Galileu e o método científico, Vol. I.* 513.
Rosenbloom, Paul C., *The Elements of Mathematical Logic.* Review by ERNEST NAGEL. 282.
ROSSI, MARIO M.: Review of Olgiati, *I fondamenti della filosofia classica.* 283.
ROSSI, MARIO M.: Review of Vasa, *Il problema della ragione.* 623.
Russell, Bertrand, *The Impact of Science on Society.* Review by V. J. MCGILL. 79.
Russell, Bertrand, *Unpopular Essays.* Review by V. J. MCGILL. 79.
Russell Answered Hume (Has—)?—HIRAM J. MCLENDON. 145.
Ruyer, Raymond, *Philosophie de la valeur.* Review by A. L. HILLIARD. 677.

Santayana (Essence and Existence in George—).—CELESTINE J. SULLIVAN, JR. 220.
Santayana and Realistic Conceptions of Authority.—HERBERT W. SCHNEIDER. 214.
Santayana's *Dominations and Powers* (Reflections on—).—VAN METER AMES, STERLING P. LAMPRECHT, HERBERT W. SCHNEIDER, CELESTINE J. SULLIVAN, JR., MARTEN TEN HOOR, JOHN W. YOLTON.
Schilling, Kurt, *Geschichte der Philosophie, Erster Band.* Review by JOSEPH KATZ. 423.
SCHIPPER, EDITH WATSON: More on Appearing Just and Being Unjust. 732.
SCHNEIDER, HERBERT W.: Note on a Not-So-Vicious Intellectualism. 121.
SCHNEIDER, HERBERT W.: Santayana and Realistic Conceptions of Authority. 214.
Schrödinger, Erwin, *Science and Humanism; Physics in Our Time.* Review by ERNEST NAGEL. 539.
SIMON, HERBERT A.: On the Definition of the Causal Relation. 517.
Simon, Yves R., *Philosophy of Democratic Government.* Review by ROBERT CUMMING. 45.
Sinclair, Angus, *The Conditions of Knowing; an Essay towards a Theory of Knowledge.* Review by ROBERT D. MACK. 506.
Slater, Robert, *Paradox and Nirvana.* Review by CLARENCE H. HAMILTON. 652.
Social Determinant (The Psyche as —).—JOHN W. YOLTON. 232.
Some Aspects of Causation in History. —E. J. TAPP. 67.
Some Neglected Philosophic Problems Regarding History.—MAURICE MANDELBAUM. 317.
Some Reflections on the Meanings of Freedom.—JOHN L. MOTHERSHEAD, JR. 667.
SOMMERS, FREDERIC: The Passing of Privileged Uniqueness. 392.
Spadafora, Francesco Leni, *La conoscenza come approssimazione.* Review by PATRICK ROMANELL. 650.
Stevenson's Distinction between Disagreement in Belief and Disagreement in Attitude (On the Tautologous Nature of—).—SOLOMON E. LEVY. 177.
Stoops, John Dashiell, *The Integrated Life.* Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 512.
STRONG, E. W.: Criteria of Explanation in History. 57.
Structure (The Categories and a Logic of—).—HERMANN WEIN. 629.
SULLIVAN, CELESTINE J. JR.: Essence and Existence in George Santayana. 220.

TAPP, E. J.: Some Aspects of Causation in History. 67.
TAYLOR, RICHARD: Negative Things. 433.
TEJERA, VICTORINO: Review of Vázquez, *Ensayos Metafísicos.* 312.
Teleology (Towards a Natural—).—D. MAURICE ALLAN. 449.
TEN HOOR, MARTEN: A City in the Skies. 226.
TEN HOOR, MARTEN: Review of *Encyclopaedisch Handboek Van Het Moderne Denken.* 311.
Tendency: The Ontological Ground of Ethics.—JOHN WILD. 461.
Tillich, Paul, *Systematic Theology,* Vol. I. Review by RAPHAEL DEMOS. 692.
Towards a Natural Teleology.—D. MAURICE ALLAN. 449.
Truth (Notes on the Pragmatic Theory of—).—MORELAND PERKINS. 573.

UNESCO Report on the Investigation Concerning Freedom.—H. J. POS. 29.

Uniqueness (The Passing of Privileged —).—FREDERIC SOMMERS. 392.

Values of Achievement versus Values of Enjoyment.—MAX RIESER. 685.

Vasa, Andrea, *Il problema della ragione.* Review by MARIO M. ROSSI. 623.

Vázquez, Juan Adolfo, *Ensayos Metafísicos.* Review by VICTORINO TEJERA. 312.

Vicious Intellectualism (Note on a Not-So- —).—HERBERT W. SCHNEIDER. 121.

Vicious Intellectualism (On a Supposed Resurgence of—).—ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY. 85.

Volkart, Edmund H., ed., *Social Behavior and Personality. Contributions of W. I. Thomas to Theory and Social Research.* Review by JOSEPH L. BLAU. 479.

WALTON, FRANCIS R.: Review of Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate.* 708.

Warbeke, John M., *The Power of Art.* Review by VAN METER AMES. 397.

Wehrli, Fritz, *Straton von Lampsakos.* Review by A. L. HILLIARD. 196.

WEIN, HERMANN: The Categories and a Logic of Structure. 629.

Wein, Hermann, *Das Problem des Relativismus. Philosophie im Übergang zur Anthropologie.* Review by LEROY E. LOEMKER. 81.

WEITZ, MORRIS: Review of Fritz, *Bertrand Russell's Construction of the External World.* 786.

What Is Philosophy of History?—LEWIS S. FEUER. 329.

WILD, JOHN: Tendency: The Ontological Ground of Ethics. 461.

Wild's (Mr.) Ontology and Ethics.—WILLIAM EARLE. 672.

Windolph, F. Lyman, *Leviathan and Natural Law.* Review by CHARLES FRANKEL. 24.

YOLTON, JOHN W.: The Psyche as Social Determinant. 232.

Young, Frederic Harold, *The Philosophy of Henry James, Sr.* Review by HAROLD A. LARRABEE. 309.

Zenith (The) as Ideal.—VAN METER AMES. 201.

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